

GIVING 'LATECOMERS' A HEAD START

Reorienting Irrigation Investments in the White Volta Basin to Improve Ecosystems Services & the Livelihoods of Women & Youth

CHALLENGES

In the White Volta Basin, women's participation in the production segment of the irrigation value chain is low due to high labor and capital requirements, land ownership issues, and inadequate access to productive resources. This is due in part to the limited knowledge of the feedback mechanisms and indirect effects of irrigation on ecosystem services and livelihoods. Gender and generational equity is also poorly understood in most contexts, especially when it comes to sharing the benefits of irrigation. There is overall paucity of information to enable stakeholders to make irrigation investment decisions at different scales. This results in poor development outcomes for irrigation investments, especially in the north.

What makes this unfortunate is the potential of irrigated agriculture to improve the livelihoods of women and youth and contribute to overall ecosystem health is high.

Existing and emerging obstacles to realising these potentials include:

- Climate change affecting water availability
- Poor irrigation infrastructure
- Land tenure/access issues
- "Unfriendly" ecosystem practices
- Poor implementation of irrigation policies

PURPOSE

The "Giving late comers a head start" project aims to evaluate the impacts and outcomes of large-, medium- and small-scale irrigation systems to improve the livelihoods of women and youth along the northern Ghana portion of the White Volta basin. Specifically, the project sought to:

- Examine the economic, social and environmental impacts of irrigation in the study sites.
- Undertake comparative analyses across the three scales to explain relative differences in their contributions to livelihoods, poverty reduction, equity and healthy ecosystems.
- Examine the potential for up- and out-scaling of irrigation investments that give women and youth a 'head start' and the changes in policy and skills needed to provide them with positive incentives for the sustainable management of ecosystems and their services.

In effect, the main goal of the project is to generate information that will help decision makers take the right decisions to address the poor development outcomes of irrigation investment in the region.

Key Achievements and outputs

In addition to supporting students to conduct research, analyzing findings, and producing publications, the project has developed five training manuals on various irrigation, livelihoods and ecosystem services related topics. These were developed based on farmer's needs assessments, which were identified during innovative platform meetings in the four districts where the study was being conducted. One major outcome of the work is that ecosystem based irrigation extension courses are being developed for incorporation into curricula of agricultural colleges in Ghana.

Based on the initial research findings, the project recommends:

- More emphasis on the livestock and aquaculture components of irrigation and ecosystems
- The need to also look at non-irrigated landscapes and their interactions with irrigated landscapes
- The need for evidence based field experimental information to further evaluate promising irrigation technologies for women and youth for up/out scaling
- The need to consider other water management technologies

The opportunities identified are:

- Continuous engagement of stakeholders to improve irrigation and ecosystems services along the White Volta Basin
- Building capacity of farmers to take advantage of identified promising and appropriate irrigation technologies
- Training of trainers (e.g. Extension Volunteers) who will in turn train farmers, especially women and youth, on appropriate irrigated production practices
- Producing publications on best irrigation practices in the White Volta basin
- Publishing of a book on Irrigation, Ecosystems and Livelihoods in the White Volta basin based on the research outputs from the project